



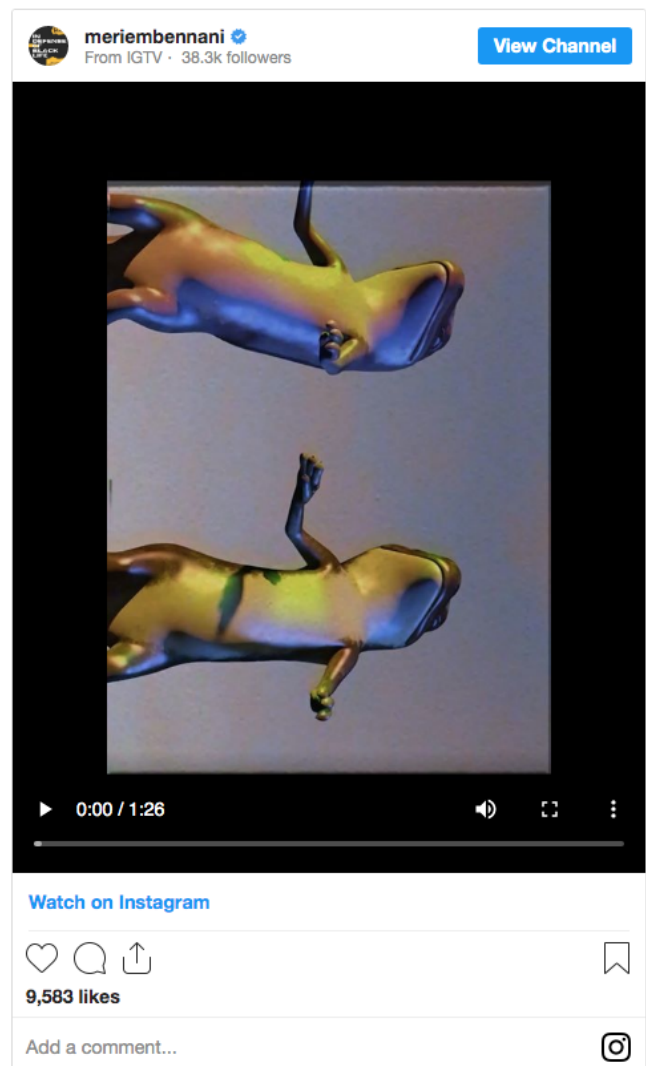
2 Lizards
The Brooklyn Rail, July 2020
(author: Charlene K. Lau)
1/3

BROOKLYN RAIL

In a time now regularly described as “challenging” or “unprecedented,” it’s tricky to find balance between the uplifting, or even saccharine—phrases like “We’re all in this together” come to mind—and the downright horrifying. Director and editor Orian Barki and artist Meriem Bennani’s animated Instagram series *2 Lizards* locates the middle while speaking to the volley of emotions activated by COVID-19. In bite-sized episodes all under five minutes each, the anthropomorphic, reptilian pair (the brown lizard is voiced by Barki, the green one, Bennani) explore the new New York, making pithy observations about everyday life in flux. Their adventures and spot-on enactments illustrate so many current lived realities imbued with snippets of mundanity, taking the viewer on an anxiety rollercoaster ride we have come to know all too well in recent months.

In the first episode, the lizards stand on a Brooklyn rooftop, reflecting on week one of lockdown. There is a lightness as they converse, serenaded by a trio of animals playing Miles Davis’s “It Never Entered My Mind” on various rooftops. As the sun sets, the friends undulate in unison to the sultry sounds of the muted trumpet (played by a camel). It’s pure poetry and kinship. But the next episode turns up the nerves as they venture out, faces masked, driving through dark, largely deserted streets.

A disposable glove falls on the windshield and out comes the coronavirus-related heebie-jeebies: sitting in the passenger seat, the green lizard gasps, “That’s so disgusting. I bet that thing has Corona on it...Fuck, I just touched my nose!” Just then, the video cuts to a brown bear dressed in a hazmat suit, tiptoeing in front of Woodhull Medical Center. As the green lizard removes the offending glove from the windshield, she thinks someone has spit on her, but it’s actually falling rain. Oh, the stress. The agitated soundtrack pulses as they push on.



2 Lizards

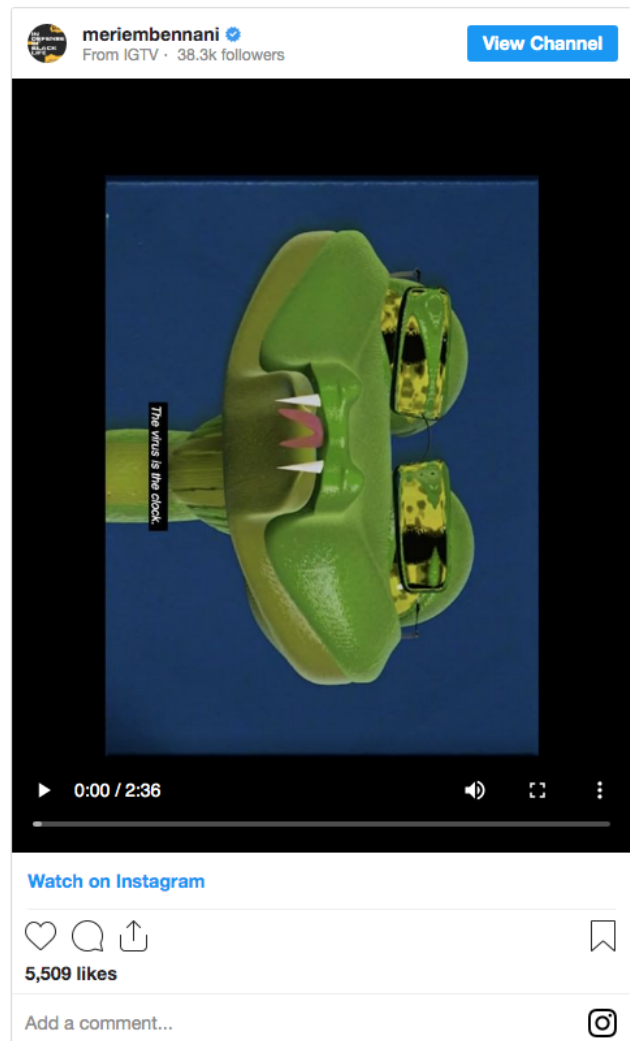
The Brooklyn Rail, July 2020

(author: Charlene K. Lau)

2/3

Journeying into Manhattan in the third episode, the two brave an empty Times Square and its still-too-bright billboards. They wonder why it feels off to them, then realize what's missing is the liveness and normalcy of rampant consumerism. Another whiff of reality hits home in episode four, which delves into the recent experiences of a cat-nurse voiced by real-life nurse Cady Chaplin. At the hospital, she commiserates with a sheep colleague on isolating away from loved ones. Later with the lizards, the cat-nurse mentions the stigma of wearing scrubs while riding the subway, a moment then punctuated by the daily 7 p.m. ritual of banging pots and pans in gratitude to healthcare workers. Animated animals have never felt so real, their classification a curious stand-in for our own differences. In this way, their virus-laden world is also ours (but cuter) and provides a great comfort against a backdrop of strangely desolate scenes and our worry-addled brains.

In a stoop hangout in the sixth episode, posted on May 12, another feline friend comments on passersby who ignore social distancing rules: "I can't. I really can't. Imagine if I just strolled around without a mask on, walking over people's stuff. Honestly even with a mask on, I feel like my body is being policed." It eerily foreshadows the uprisings to come within weeks. The following episode confronts anti-Black police violence and widespread demonstrations, with the lizards playing supporting roles allowing prevailing events to speak. During a live news broadcast, the anchor-mouse surmises how after three days of protest, a curfew was imposed despite being previously "impossible" during the pandemic. As the mouse prepares to talk to protestors live in Brooklyn, a producer-bear insists that the mouse speak to the police chief currently on hold, unsurprisingly portrayed as a pig. "Don't do this to me, Scott. Don't! Don't you dare!" rebukes the mouse. Unheeded, the chief of police is put on the line and the mouse refuses to speak, her eyes narrowed. Moving on, the broadcast resumes with interviews with protestors recalling how white guilt has taken up space in workplace discussions, followed by a cameo of the lizards voicing solidarity from non-Black POC communities and standing up for Black trans lives. As the episode closes



2 Lizards

The Brooklyn Rail, July 2020

(author: Charlene K. Lau)

3/3

with actual footage of white supremacist monuments being toppled all around the world, it asks in parallel: who gets to speak and whose voices are heard? How is journalistic integrity maintained in the reporting of the protests?

To date, *2 Lizards* presents a dual reckoning: a markedly changed way of life due to the pandemic, and the markedly unchanged state-led persecution of Black and Indigenous life. The show depicts collective lived struggles by combining recognizable cityscapes, a soundtrack that oscillates between hope and uncertainty, and the slithery pair's sincere dialogue within their multi-species macrocosm. They radiate warmth and honesty so needed on our planet, a real friendship that cannot be scripted. Neither false positivity nor dark realism, the series is a palm-sized modesty with outsized impact. It's a world of authenticity, whatever that may mean now.